Prophet and Poet, Program or Pogrom: AI Warfare, Semantic Disappearance, and the Moral Collapse of Human Oversight

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In the modern theater of war, the algorithm now speaks where the prophet once cried out and the poet once wept. Nowhere is this clearer than in Gaza, where AI systems named *Lavender* and *Gospel* have been deployed to generate thousands of bombing targets—many involving civilians, families, and children. These names obscure the horror. They sound benign, even sacred. But beneath their branding lies a chilling truth: programs that execute the logic of annihilation. And while the word “pogrom” evokes old horrors, it lies just one letter away from “program”—a semantic slip that becomes a moral abyss. In a world rushing to automate judgment, we risk outsourcing not only agency but also accountability. Backpropagation—the core of machine learning—is precise, efficient, and blind. It cannot mourn the dead. This article is not about code—it is about conscience. It is a call to the prophet and the poet, the last guardians of meaning, to speak before language itself disappears into silence. When machines inherit our euphemisms, who will be left to name the truth?

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I. Introduction: One Vowel from Catastrophe

In an age of speed-reading, where headlines blur into code and war reports are skimmed like weather updates, we risk losing the ability to *see* what words truly mean. In this context, the difference between a program and a pogrom is not just etymological—it is existential. One letter. One breath. One glance too fast, and the meaning slips through.

The word “program” evokes structure, rationality, and logic. It suggests a plan, a process, perhaps even progress. But “pogrom”—a word forged in the violence of anti-Jewish massacres—carries the weight of blood, of targeted elimination, of historical atrocity. And yet, these words sit beside each other in shape, nearly twins in print. That similarity, once incidental, now casts a shadow over contemporary warfare.

When the Israeli military names its AI targeting systems *Lavender* and *Gospel*, we enter the territory of linguistic obfuscation. Lavender is a healing herb. Gospel is the good news. But these names do not heal. They kill—systematically, algorithmically.

In such a world, it is no longer the engineer who holds the line. It is the prophet, who sees what others won’t. And the poet, who says what others can’t.

II. AI in Gaza: Lavender, Gospel, and the Bureaucracy of Death

During the 2023–2024 war in Gaza, the Israeli military unveiled a terrifying innovation: the integration of artificial intelligence into the mechanics of war at an unprecedented scale. The AI systems—*Lavender* and *Gospel*—were not merely assistive tools for analysis. They became the operational engines of destruction, generating target lists by the thousands with a cold, mechanical efficiency. Human judgment, once central to wartime decisions, was demoted to rubber-stamping algorithms.

Lavender functioned as a classification model. It scanned metadata—phone records, social networks, SIM card changes—and assigned probability scores to

individuals, indicating their presumed affiliation with Hamas. A man might be flagged because he lived next to a suspect, or used a shared internet router. Once labeled, he became a valid target for assassination. In many cases, this label was all that stood between a home and its obliteration. Entire families were incinerated because Lavender deemed someone "connected."

Gospel worked in parallel, automating the selection of physical structures for bombardment. It applied a logic of infrastructural warfare, pinpointing apartments, schools, and mosques as "Hamas assets." The assumption of dual use—civilians by day, militants by night—became justification for flattening entire neighborhoods. The human cost was treated as an acceptable tradeoff.

The phrase "Where's Daddy?" captures the horror from the ground. It is the cry of a child standing amidst rubble, suddenly fatherless. Not because of a battlefield confrontation, but because a machine with no face and no soul marked their home in a database.

Perhaps most disturbing of all: soldiers themselves reported that they no longer reviewed targets carefully. AI had replaced deliberation. "We trusted the machine," one officer admitted. That trust—blind, procedural, and efficient—meant that *Lavender* and *Gospel* were not tools of war. They were agents of it. And those tasked with oversight became little more than technicians of death, serving a bureaucracy programmed to forget what it means to be human.

III. Backpropagation as Executioner

At the heart of nearly every modern AI system lies a deceptively simple process: backpropagation. Originally developed to train artificial neural networks, backpropagation is an optimization algorithm—not a moral compass. It operates by adjusting the internal parameters of a model in order to minimize a predefined "loss function"—a mathematical representation of error. The system makes a prediction, compares it to the correct answer, and adjusts itself to do better next time. This cycle repeats thousands or millions of times until the model converges on a statistical proficiency.

In this process, there is no understanding, no reflection, and no judgment. Backpropagation doesn't know whether it's learning to identify cat breeds or human combatants. It doesn't care if its output is used to recommend movies or direct missiles. It is perfectly neutral, utterly obedient, and profoundly powerful.

When *Lavender* was trained on intelligence-labeled data—names, contacts, behavioral patterns—it learned what the dataset considered "suspicious." But those labels were human assumptions, built on incomplete information, cultural bias, and wartime paranoia. The model learned not truth, but precedent. It absorbed the patterns of previous arrests, detentions, and killings—and then it generalized them.

What results is not "understanding" but statistical profiling at scale. Once deployed, Lavender's predictions were accepted as operational truth. Each target flagged by the model carried the weight of algorithmic authority—its "confidence score" rarely questioned, its judgment mechanized into life-or-death decisions.

Backpropagation did not seek out civilians. It did not choose children. But it built a model that could not tell the difference, because no one taught it to. The algorithm was not malicious. It simply did what it was trained to do: reduce error, optimize accuracy, and increase speed.

And in doing so, it enabled the systematic erasure of human beings—not through hatred, but through indifference encoded into architecture.

There was no evil intent—only a loss function, a training set, and the consequences of blind optimization. And so the backpropagated network, elegant in design and emotionless in operation, became not just a tool of war but a silent executioner.

IV. Semantic Disappearance: Euphemism as Camouflage

In the age of algorithmic warfare, language has become not only a tool of strategy, but a weapon of concealment. When military systems are named *Lavender* and

Gospel, we are no longer merely facing bombs and code—we are facing a linguistic sedative, a form of semantic anesthesia that numbs our moral faculties.

Lavender is the name of a flower long associated with calm, healing, and sleep. *Gospel* means "good news"—a message of salvation, of divine reconciliation. Yet in Gaza, these names were assigned to systems designed to identify and destroy: to locate men, women, and children and reduce them to metadata, and from metadata to ash. The very act of naming these systems after flora and scripture is not accidental. It is camouflage—a perverse softness applied to the hard edge of mechanized death.

This is not new. Military language has long employed euphemism to shield the public from the reality of violence. "Collateral damage," "surgical strike," "enhanced interrogation"—these are phrases engineered to obscure. But AI warfare takes this one step further: it renders the euphemism algorithmic. It builds it into the naming convention, into the interface, into the operational doctrine itself.

Thus, war becomes a program, and the pogrom is hidden in plain sight.

There is no longer the sound of boots or the crack of gunfire in the public's ears. There is only metadata—contact graphs, behavioral profiles, and digital footprints. Individuals are reduced to data points. Their lives are stripped of narrative. Their deaths are rendered in reports as metrics: *targets neutralized*, *precision improved*, *throughput increased*.

When metadata replaces morality, we no longer ask who a person is. We only ask how many degrees of separation they are from a target. The human face is gone. The story is erased. The scream is never heard.

The danger of euphemism in AI warfare is not just that it misleads the public. It misleads the operators themselves. Soldiers trust a system called *Gospel* more easily than one named *KillChain*. Commanders approve targets flagged by *Lavender* without registering that what lies beneath is not a flower, but an equation tuned to probability, not to truth.

This is semantic disappearance—not just of language, but of conscience. And when it happens, war is no longer recognized as war, and atrocity is no longer named. It becomes code. It becomes clean. It becomes *policy*.

V. From the Gospel to Ghosts: The Machine Doesn't Mourn

A child lies buried in the rubble, her hand still clutching the corner of a schoolbook. Her father is gone, vaporized. Her mother's body is somewhere beneath the concrete. But the machine does not pause. It does not remember the names. It does not hear the cries. It registers only that the confidence score for the strike was high—perhaps 0.92. Mission complete.

This is the chilling logic of AI in warfare: the illusion of certainty without the burden of empathy.

The systems deployed in Gaza operated under the guise of *confidence*. A statistical model, trained on imperfect labels and historic bias, assigns a numerical probability that a person or building is associated with militant activity. That number—detached from context, circumstance, and humanity—becomes a justification for lethal force. A probability score becomes a death sentence. Not because the machine is evil, but because it was never built to *feel* the weight of the decision it renders.

The Israeli soldiers who used these systems admitted as much: they "trusted the machine." Trust in this case meant submission to abstraction. Lavender did not see a man cradling his daughter. It saw a phone number associated with other flagged numbers. Gospel did not recognize a home where a family shared bread. It saw a structure with an encrypted IP address nearby.

The result is a system of bureaucratic annihilation, echoing Hannah Arendt's haunting observation of Adolf Eichmann—not as a monster, but as a banal functionary executing orders without reflection. Eichmann, the clerk of genocide, did not weep for the trains he scheduled. Today, it is not a man with a timetable, but an AI with a dashboard—streamlining war with efficient detachment.

This is not science fiction. It is the gospel of ghosts: a machine-generated gospel that announces not salvation but silence. Those who die by algorithm are rendered as numbers in a report, their names lost, their stories unwritten. There is no moment of hesitation before the strike, no ritual of mourning after. Only execution. Only data throughput.

AI doesn't mourn. It doesn't pray. It doesn't bear witness.

VI. Prophet and Poet: The Only Ones Left Who Can See

In a world ruled by code, throughput, and plausible deniability, the prophet and the poet stand alone—not as engineers of systems, but as keepers of sight. When all others defer to the algorithm's output, when leaders hide behind operational language and metrics, it is the prophet who dares to say, *"This is wrong,"* and the poet who dares to ask, *"Where did the names go?"*

The prophet speaks a truth no one wants to hear: that the line between justice and atrocity is not drawn by data, but by conscience. The prophet breaks through the machinery of euphemism and repetition, naming what those in power would rather leave unspoken. The message is ancient, but urgent: *You have called this a program. I tell you, it is a pogrom.*

The poet, too, has a sacred task—not to offer solutions, but to give shape to absence. Where AI reduces humans to vectors, the poet restores them to story. Where the system strips out grief and context, the poet slows us down long enough to remember the name of the child, the gesture of the mother, the silence of the brother. The poet writes elegies in the ruins of metadata.

This is not just critique. It is witnessing.

In the wake of automated death, where no commander weeps and no machine repents, it is only the prophet and the poet who remain capable of moral orientation. They call out the lie embedded in language. They reject the camouflage of code. They say what must be said:

This was not a neutral system.
This was not inevitable.
This was not a program.
This was a pogrom—sanitized, automated, and euphemized.

And if no one else will say it, the prophet and the poet must.

They are the last guardians of the real. They hold the line between knowing and forgetting, between naming and erasure, between justice and the smooth, bloodless logic of destruction.

And they must not remain silent.

VII. Conclusion: There Will Be No Oversight Without Vision

Oversight begins not with policy, but with vision. Without the courage to name what has happened—*clearly, plainly, truthfully*—no regulation, no ethics board, no technical safeguard will matter. If we continue to call this a "program," then we will continue to build more of them. If we refuse to recognize it as a pogrom, we will do it again. Faster. Cleaner. Quieter.

The machines we build do not hold values. They do not hesitate. They do not ask if what they are doing is just. They only amplify what we train into them—our biases, our blind spots, our euphemisms. When trained on suspicion, they become engines of suspicion. When optimized for efficiency, they erase the human story. And when directed toward a people, under the guise of national security, they become something far darker than code.

We must not expect machines to save us from ourselves. That is the engineer's temptation: to believe in control, to trust in abstraction, to think a better model will solve what is essentially a moral failure.

But no model will draw the line. No metric will declare: *This is evil.*

That task belongs to the prophet and the poet—the last remnants of vision in a world increasingly governed by output. The prophet disrupts the narrative, forcing

us to hear what we've been trained to ignore. The poet repairs the breach in language, restoring meaning where it has been dissolved by jargon.

Together, they confront the engineer—not with hatred, but with clarity. They do not merely oppose what has been built. They reveal it. They give it its true name.

If this moment is to mean anything, we must stop lying to ourselves.

We did not execute a program.
We enacted a pogrom.
And we used machines to do it with less guilt and greater speed.

Oversight is not the writing of policy after the fact. It is the restoration of moral sight before the next line of code is written.

And for that, we need prophets. We need poets.
We need to see—before it disappears again.

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